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## INTERACTION OF FORMAL EDUCATION WITH THE HOUSEHOLD ECONOMY IN RURAL ETHIOPIA: THE CASE OF THE WOYISSO-QANCAARA, EAST SHOWA ZONE OF OROMIA REGION

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**ABSTRACT** In recent years, there has been a dramatic rise in enthusiasm for formal education among the rural community of Woyisso-Qancaara. This means that formal education, as an institution that evolved in an alien culture, is coming into closer interaction with the social and economic realities of the inhabitants of Woyisso-Qancaara. Among the implications of this interaction is the ascription of a new status and role of a student on school-going children, which is disturbing the traditional household division of labor. It will be noted that by sending their children to schools, households are forced to incur the opportunity cost of forgoing the immediate use of the labor of their children. The paper describes some mechanisms by which households cope with the resulting labor shortfall. Other than forgoing the labor of their children, parents also needed to invest part of their income on the schooling of their children. The opportunity cost of forgoing labor and the actual cost of supporting schooling combine with the decrease in the average income of households and the rise in population to weaken the economy of households in Woyisso-Qancaara.

**Key Words:** Formal education; Woyisso-Qancaara; Labor; Opportunity cost; Household income/economy.

### INTRODUCTION

Fagerline & Lawrence (1983: 78) documented cases in which “the belief that more education leads to better jobs has been a principal motivating factor for young people to stay in school longer” and for parents to support education of their children in spite of the economic burden it entails. For rural communities of Ethiopia, this implies that parents are increasingly seeing formal education as a bridge to urban life. In the process, formal education insists on certain knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, values and norms of behavior on the students through the instrumentality of overt and covert curriculum and instruction. Since formal education had not arisen out of the social and economic context of the inhabitants of the rural communities of Ethiopia, it is reasonable to expect the process of dynamic interaction between formal education and the social, economic and metaphysical dimensions at the local level. This paper limits itself to outlining some implications of formal education on the production and allocation of household resources.

I will begin by providing some background information on the location and demography of the community, the structure and division of labor of its house-

holds, and labor socialization of children. The remaining part of the paper is devoted to a direct treatment of the theme at hand.

## BACKGROUND

Woyisso-Qancaara is found in Adami-Tulu-Judo-Kombolcha district of East Shewa Zone of the Oromia Regional Government. According to the 1994 census, the population and number of households of Woyisso-Qancaara is 1616 and 328 respectively. If the population grew at the rate of 2.23% estimated by the Central Statistical Authority (1996) for the rural population, Woyisso-Qancaara would be projected at 1972 in 2003.

Zuuwaay, Adami Tulu and Bulbula are the three towns in the district that are relatively closer to Woyisso-Qancaara. Historically, there used to be a very loose interaction of the rural people with these towns. Nowadays, however, members of the community visit them much more regularly for various errands such as to attend markets, schooling, police, court and clinics.

### I. Household Structure and Division of Labour

The community practices polygamy, and a household may consist of a male head, his wife or wives and their children. Generally, households that are in the early stages of their developmental cycle are composed of a husband, a wife and their young children. If a household head marries another wife or wives, a hut is built for each additional wife. The occasional presence of grandparents and other relatives contributes to the variation in household structure.

The community practices a mixed economy of animal husbandry and subsistence farming. Administration of livestock is the domain of men although women also play a major role in milking cows and goats, churning milk for cheese and butter, clearing and moving cattle from the barn and preparing forage for the livestock. Other than administration of livestock, men are also responsible for clearing and preparing farmland, plowing, harrowing, sowing, weeding, harvesting, threshing and storing grains in the barn. Here too women assist in preparing and serving food and water for the work party, and also in harrowing and weeding. Men sell grain and livestock when the household has some financial emergency. Women prepare and serve food, grind grain, fetch water, collect firewood and clean the house. They sell cheese and butter and buy small household utilities such as oil and salt with the proceedings.

Girls and boys in the household assist their mother and father respectively, and assume more and more difficult responsibilities as they grow older. The most common forms of assistance girls render to their mother are fetching water, collecting firewood, cleaning the house, preparing food for their siblings and separating calves or heifers from their mother for milking by an adult women. Boys participate in weeding, but their important role is to look after cattle.

## II. Labour Socialization of Children

In the earliest years of a child's life, a mother spends much more time with it than a father does. Apart from the emotional support she gives, a mother feeds her child, washes it, and watches over it to avoid risks of injury. She also provides psychomotor training to the child, such as how to feed and wash itself and how to walk and talk. The education provided by the mother at this stage is not differentiated on the basis of gender. However, the gender perception of an infant begins to form as early as they can observe differential sex roles of men and women within their household.

Once a child develops a degree of independence from the mother, which is demonstrated in the child's ability to feed itself and walk around the hamlet, boys and girls begin to receive specialized education and develop a differentiated perception of themselves. With the onset of this stage, boys and girls begin to associate with each other less and less. The main reason for the segregation between boys and girls who belong to a kinship group is the sexual division of labor. The latter defines their respective physical boundary where one excludes the other. Hence, women's roles generally confine them to the home most of the day while men's roles take them away from the home.

A mother and older female siblings begin to give a more specialized training to a female child early. This training begins with attending to household errands that do not require much physical strength and, as the female child matures, growth to more complex responsibilities such as cleaning the house, fetching water and cooking food for the siblings.

The responsibility of training a male child for specialized male roles rests primarily with the father, although older male siblings and male members of the extended family play very important roles. The initial training consists mainly in how to look after smaller stock such as goats, calves and heifers. As the child grows older, he is made to herd larger stock. Involving the child in farming is a gradual process that begins with training in weeding and harrowing to plowing, harvesting and threshing.

## FORMAL EDUCATION AND THE HOUSEHOLD ECONOMY

To acquire formal education, the inhabitants of Woyisso-Qancaara turn mainly to the six schools in the region that are situated at various distances outside the jurisdiction of the Kebele. These are the Zuuwaay High School, Adami Tulu Junior Secondary School, Woransa Junior Secondary School, Suro Elementary School, Shishoo Xaabboo Elementary School and the Access Centers of Rift Valley Women and Children Association.

As enthusiasm for formal education is rising among the inhabitants of Woyisso-Qancaara, more and more children are going to these schools. This means that the community is increasingly vesting a new and additional status and role of a student on its school-going children. Below, I will outline the

implication of this additional status and role on the production and allocation of household resources.

### I. Production and Formal Education

In their productive activities, households adapt to the labor requirements of their productive tasks. In an earlier section, it was noted that as girls and boys grow older, they share more workload of their mother and father respectively. Their share of work in the household would keep especially female children busy all day. On the other hand, schools generally keep students for half a day. In addition, teachers in all schools require students to do homework and also expect them to study for exams. Shouldering these duties takes a considerable amount of time. If students were to dutifully meet what is expected of them as students, they would be left with little time to attend to their share of labor in the household.

Faced with this dilemma of double loyalty, namely, its growing commitment to its function of schooling its children, on the one hand, and its dependence on their labor, on the other, the household employs a combination of various strategies to balance the demands of both. One strategy is the assumption of more burdens by parents. Adding additional personnel is another strategy that is employed to meet the labor shortfall within the household. One option along this line is temporary employment of personnel for various farm activities in which case the household head will focus on looking after cattle. Another option is either adoption or employment of a child to help with looking after cattle in which case the household head may be engaged in farm activities. Yet another strategy requires children to take a portion of the time they would otherwise spend on their education and use it to assist labor requirements of the household. A number of children complained that their parents obliged them to be absent from school to attend to various household errands. They said their parents allowed them little or no time for studying and doing their school homework. Some children said that even if their parents allowed them time to study, they found it difficult to concentrate on their study when they knew that their parents needed their assistance. Hence, students with this attitude preferred to miss classes or suspend their study to assist their parents. An extreme form of this strategy is when parents detain one or more children from school for one or more consecutive or intermittent years.

Although the ascription of an additional role of student to children has increased the burden of all members of the household, the workload weighs heavier on its female members. Even when her daughters are available fulltime to assist her, a mother is the most burdened in any household with a working day of 14-16 hours. In the absence of half-day assistance by their daughter, mothers have to increase their productivity per unit of time if they are to accomplish the daily household tasks. Other than increasing their own productivity, mothers have to make as much use of the time of their daughters as they can if they are to cope with the female labor requirement of their household.

This they do both by making them stay home every few days and by maximum exploitation of their out-of-school time. This implies that daughters miss a number of contact hours with their teachers and are given very little time to study and do their school homework.

Upon sending his sons to school, a household head has two general options. One option is to employ or adopt a child who can look after stock while he continues to work on the farm. The other option is to employ labor that can work on the farm under his supervision while he takes over his sons' role of looking after stock. This option would free him from both duties for half a day when the sons will be available to look after stock. Household heads generally adopt the latter option. There could be other reasons that prompt a household head to make this choice but the obviously less hard work it entails could be a major consideration. Although it lessens the labor burden of the household head, this choice does not contribute to strengthening the household economy. In this connection, it is important to mention that a number of women have portrayed their husbands as lazy.

Households' labor constraint further worsens if parents decide to send their children to the schools at Adami Tulu and Zuuwaay. At this stage, children leave their parents to temporarily dwell in the towns for the academic year. This prevents parents from making use of the extra school hours of their children.

During the weekends they spend in their household, students are expected to and do generally participate in meeting its labor requirements. But since students will not be at the disposal of parents for most of the year, parents are forced to use the options of adding additional personnel and raising the productivity of its home-based personnel to cope with its labor requirements.

## II. Allocation of Household Resources and Formal Education

A household that sends its children to school incurs a number of expenses to meet the material requirements of schooling. These include annual school fees, irregular contributions, and spending on the purchases of materials for the students. All schools require parents of their students to pay an annual fee. The amount varies from school to school but it generally ranges between 20-30 Birr. Moreover, households sending children to a particular school pay the same amount of fee irrespective of the number of children each sends to that school. Other than this, the school's administration makes appeals for contribution payable in money, kind, or both for such purposes as maintenance and construction of additional rooms, fencing of compounds, purchase of furniture, equipment and materials such as for sporting activities and to meet shortfalls of budget. A household must buy school materials such as notebooks, pens and pencils and rent or buy textbooks for each of its school-going children.

Households with children who advance in their education and join the junior high school in Adami Tulu and the high school in Zuuwaay incur additional expenses of which the most notable are lodging and food expenses. Renting is

the most common way of providing accommodation to children. Crowding in one room is the method students use to minimize their rent expense. If lodgers come from different households, they share the rent expense, pool together food items and take turns to prepare food. Depending on its size, three to six students of the same sex could inhabit a room together. But, when lodgers of a room are of opposite sex, they are siblings who have a reasonable age gap. A few students live with relatives who have settled in the towns. These incur neither lodging nor food expenses. Lodging students or their parents bring grain from the households stock and store it in their homes in the town, but they buy other cooking materials such as oil, salt and fuel in the town.

The households derive their income predominantly from the sale of stock, grain and animal products. The costs of schooling are covered primarily from the sale of grain by the household head. If grain is not available in stock, smaller stock like goats and, on rare occasions, cattle are sold to meet the expenses. Women may subsidize some of their child's educational expenses from the meager income they derive from the sale of butter and milk.

The cost of educating children rises considerably as they join the schools in Admi Tulu and Zuuwaay. Parents in the sample households said that the actual cost of schooling could be absorbed without much economic strain when their children lived with them and went to the nearby first cycle primary schools of Shishoo Xaabboo and Access Centers. For this reason, households send most of their school-going children to any of the first cycle schools. On the other hand, parents said they found it very stressful to support their children who had to live in and go to school at Adami Tulu and Zuuwaay. This requires households to make decisions on whether some or all of its children should discontinue schooling.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

It is important to point out that anticipation of employment for children in the long run is an important reason for the rise in enthusiasm for formal education among the inhabitants of Woyisso-Qancaara. However, households that are motivated by this perceived long-term economic advantage are forced to incur the opportunity cost of forgoing the immediate use of the labor of their children. This requires them to employ various mechanisms to cope with the labor shortfall in the household. Assuming more workload by parents, employing labor or adopting children, maximizing on out-of-school time of the children were identified to be some of the most important mechanisms. We noted that other than forgoing child labor, parents also needed to invest part of their income on supporting schooling such as buying school materials and paying regular fees and extraordinary contributions. When students go to school in towns, their parents incur major additional costs such as for lodging. The immediate consequence of these costs combines with the decrease in the average income of the households.

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